

## FRENCH INDO-CHINA

and law, has been a primary cause of their immaturity as a people, both politically and emotionally.

Honour, like altruism, is an individualistic conception. Only superficially is it akin to Oriental "face." In "face" there is more vanity, and it depends upon the amount of concrete authority and prestige a man can muster either through his position or personality. Honour arose out of the European's need for making himself respected, even when he could count on nothing but his own character. When honour degenerates into touchiness, as in the practice of duelling, for instance, it becomes more akin to "face." But there is always an essential difference, for the Oriental has no concept of personal dignity. He is insolent in good fortune and obsequious in misfortune. Honour, a subjective ideal, depends entirely upon its owner: "face," being objective, can be destroyed or created by the attitude of other people.

Honour and altruism alike seem to the Annamites both droll and stupid. The servant who says of his master: "*Monsieur beaucoup bon, Monsieur beaucoup bete*" sums up the Oriental's viewpoint. In a society where there is no middle ground between being a sheep or a wolf—and one is a sheep only when one cannot become a wolf—voluntary abstention from preying upon the weak is incomprehensible.

Proselytizing to the native intelligentsia is but another proof of European discourtesy. The assumption of superiority inherent in the assimilationist idea is part and parcel of missionary work. Christianity with its confusing and metaphysical preoccupations has not the ordered clarity of Chinese philosophy, and seems in consequence an inferior superstition. Differences in dogma are not striking enough, nor the

Catholic liturgy sufficiently aesthetic to lure the cultured classes. Annamite religion is essentially practical, whereas Catholicism is based on revelation. These considerations pale beside the important obstacle—that Catholicism runs counter to the social and political fabric of Annamite society. Catholicism, with its concern for the individual soul, subordinates society's interests to its salvation. Even more, Protestantism, by making the individual conscience the supreme arbiter, undermines the religious sanction Confucius gives to society and the state. Polygamy and the ancestral cult are but two illustrations of the irreconcilable differences between the Christian and Confucianist outlook. Hierarchy, firmly ingrained in the Annamite soul, finds satisfaction in graded regions: Confucianist doctrines for those who can appreciate its subtleties, and a profoundly modified Buddhist-Taoist practice for the masses. In short\* the Annamites are satisfied with a religion which